Fly Fishing the Improbable

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/883150.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	pre will graham/hannibal lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Will's dogs, Alana Bloom
Additional Tags:	fish jerky, someone helped Will Graham, Will doesn't liking touching, back story
Language:	English
Series:	Part 4 of Friendship is Not My Forte
Stats:	Published: 2013-07-14 Words: 5,154 Chapters: 1/1

Fly Fishing the Improbable

by Azure_K_Mello

Summary

Catching a catfish is a great thing to do with a Friday afternoon. Seeing a man about a boat on a Saturday is even better.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

The day was nice. His head hurt a little, but not too much, and a gentle snow had fallen in the night. He never had office hours on Friday which meant that after two morning classes he went home and ate lunch standing at his sink and looking out over the field. He never knew why people looked down on eating at the sink. He had a nice view and it saved on dirty dishes.

It was clear and sunny as he walked to the river and lake it fed. The dogs walked along with him in the early afternoon sunshine. Will stood on the shore, casting lines. He ran through different flies, waiting to see what would bite, or at least nibble. The dogs tramped around in the snow, playing and chasing each other. Will smiled as he watched and cast his line again. It was three quiet hour before he got a good solid bite instead of a nibble. It was a large fly with a big hook and whatever it was, it was huge. He reeled it in, fighting it and sometimes giving it line to tire itself out. He worried about the line breaking.

It was a blue catfish. He had known that there were catfish in these waters but he'd never actually caught one here. Besides, catching a catfish while fly fishing was practically unheard of. He smiled at it. It had to be about three years old as it was over fifteen pounds of meat even accounting for bones. He hit its head on the ground to kill it and started to clean it. It was a lot of meat. Will had been taught never to waste food but he didn't "honor every part" like Garrett Jacob Hobbs. He threw the organs aside and the dogs fell upon them. Back at the house he looked at the fish and started having ideas for what to do with it. He needed stuff to make it work but first he got a large Tupperware container. He skinned the fish and cut off about eight pounds of the flesh. In the container he mixed tomato sauce, onion powder, cayenne pepper, thyme, basil, pepper, garlic and liquid smoke. Then he cut the meat into strips and placed them into the Tupperware, making sure they were all covered in the marinade before putting the lid on and putting the whole thing in the fridge.

He needed supplies to cook the rest. And he did want Alana to have a nice time so he went out to the store. He wasn't planning anything fancy because he couldn't cook anything fancy. It was Louisianan Creole his dad had cooked them. No matter where they were in the south, when his dad cooked, it was flavors from his dad's home. It was the food he knew. He bought a lot of stuff and thought it would be nice to cook. It was mindless and quiet and the dogs would keep him company while he worked.

He fed the boys when he got home, making sure they'd be eating and wouldn't get under his feet too much. First he made lemonade ice tea and put it in the fridge. He was sure there was a beer or cocktail that would go well but he remembered Hannibal's words about habits that allowed him to not become a drunk. He made catfish cakes, too many for him and Alana to eat but he thought he would bring lots to Hannibal, a thank you for his taking Will to pick up the boat. Then he made coleslaw, it was fast work and he put it in the fridge.

He hummed as he set up everything for gumbo. It was a slow cook soup and he set it up without adding the fish. He didn't add rice because he only wanted to use it as a course, not a meal. He cut up tomatoes, banana peppers and a lemon and made remoulade sauce. Finally put the meat into the soup and put the lid on.

There was a knock on the door and Will went to it. The dogs got excited at the idea of guests. They were terrible guards. They'd let Georgia Madchen get under his bed. Thank goodness she'd turned out to be nice, a victim, or Will would have had to move. "Boys, calm down." They didn't and he commanded, "Sit." They did and he opened the door with a smile.

Alana was standing there, bundled in a winter coat. She really was beautiful. Will smiled at her and said, "Come on in." he took her coat once the door was shut. He hung it up and said, "I have appetizers, or, really, snack food. It's the sort of thing you eat while leaning against the counter."

He led her into the kitchen and she sighed, "Will, it smells amazing."

"Good," he said.

She pulled a box from her purse, wrapped in a pretty ribbon. "These are for you."

"Thank you," he said accepting the box. He saw that it was chocolate and said, "I have no idea how to make dessert so these are perfect." He took the cakes from the oven where he'd left them to stay warm. "I hope you like catfish."

"I haven't had much catfish but I've liked it when I had it."

He used a spatula to move the cakes onto a plate and said, "Good, because I caught a huge one this afternoon." He placed the plate on the counter and turned to get the jug of lemonade and tea and poured them each a glass. He handed one off and took one of the little delicious morsels. He popped it into his mouth.

Alana exclaimed over the cakes and Will felt pleased. They talked about their days, she'd had a full day of class and was pleased for the weekend to be finally beginning. She had summer to look forward to whereas the FBI Academy was year round and Will liked that because too much free time had never been good for him.

Alana didn't mind having the dogs in the kitchen and she asked Will after their health. It was an easy chat, safe topics that Will could easily talk about. Will stirred the soup several times before ladling it into bowls. He'd made too much and he had known that while cooking but he would freeze the rest of it. It froze well and his dad would like it when he came to visit. Then he would add rice. They ate at the table. Will brought the jug of lemonade tea to the table knowing that Alana might want to cool her mouth as the gumbo was pretty spicy.

Alana loved the soup too and Will smiled and afterwards said, "I have no idea how Hannibal times everything perfectly. I need a few minutes for the pièce de résistance." He said it jokingly as he stood but she looked at him seriously.

"You shouldn't put this down, even jokingly, it's really great food. This meal kind of reminds me of Hannibal's kitchen before a dinner party. Have you ever been there before a dinner party?"

"Yeah, he keeps handing you things to taste." Will cut up the remaining fish into four fillets as he spoke. His deft hands moved quickly. He'd cut fish for his father even when he'd been

quite young.

“It’s nice and so much more relaxing than the actual dinner party.”

“I’ve never actually attended any.”

She shook her head, “Don’t. It would be excruciating for you. The banter, joviality, perfect manners would be torturous. You’d be uncomfortable and making an effort all night. Do not put yourself through that.”

He smiled, “Good to know. From what Hannibal has said to me I think he has his friends in his kitchen and his acquaintances in the dining room.”

She considered it and said, “Yeah, I think that’s right.” She watched him sprinkle hot sauce over the fish, put oil into a skillet and mix the breadcrumb coating in a paper bag. “You’re a very competent person, Will.”

Will was surprised and confused. “Thanks?” it came out as a question because he didn’t know what she meant.

“It’s just, sometimes you seem delicate. But, really, you’re a capable person.”

Will shrugged, thinking of his father and of the way he felt in field and said, “In my house I’m always capable. It’s other people that upset the balance of my life.” Then he added, “And you’re not other people.”

“No?” she asked, taking a sip of her drink and leaning back in her chair.

“No, you’re Alana Bloom. You don’t count as other people. If I had dinner parties you would be in my kitchen not in the dining room.”

She looked touched as she said, “Coming from you that means a lot.”

He smiled as he put the fish in the bag and shook it. He placed the fillets into the now hot oil. He got the long rolls he’d bought and said, “These are not real po boy rolls. You can’t really find real po boy bread outside of New Orleans but we ate them everywhere we went so the perfect bread doesn’t matter too much.” His head gave a sudden bad twinge and Will glanced at his watch. It had been five hours since he had taken aspirin. There was a bottle on the counter and he dry swallowed a couple.

“Headache?”

He nodded but said, “Not as bad as some days but I don’t want to let it get out of hand. I’m fine.” He spread one side of the bread thickly with the remoulade and got the coleslaw, tomatoes, lemon and peppers from the fridge. The fish fried quickly and he pulled it out of the oil and patted it with paper towel. After putting the fish on top of the remoulade he piled coleslaw, peppers and tomatoes on top. He added the lemons to the plates and grabbed knives and forks. “If we were in the south I wouldn’t give you a knife and fork but these are pretty messy to pick up so I’ll leave it up to your discretion.” She laughed.

Alana ate it with her hands and Will admired that about her. She moaned and said, “Will, this is really great.”

Will chuckled and said, “I wonder if I cook well or if you and Hannibal are so surprised that I don’t cut myself on the knives or burn myself on the stove that you just think the food is good.”

Shrugging she said, “You may have a little bit of a point. It might be ninety percent good food and ten percent, ‘Will Graham did this?’”

He laughed, “I’ll take ninety percent.” It was a good sandwich. Nothing special, exactly what he grew up on, he’d always liked it but he wasn’t sure it was deserving of praise. “I’m glad you like it.” They fell silent but it was comfortable and Will didn’t feel the need to fill it. Alana cleaned her plate which made Will pleased. “So, what are your plans for the weekend?”

“Nothing. I am relaxing. I have a book.”

“Very nice,” he said. “Hannibal is coming with me to pick up my boat and we’re going to the opera.”

“That should be fun.”

He nodded, “I think so, yeah. Coffee?”

“Yeah, that would be great.” When he was going through the process the dogs stood, as always at the noise of the grinder. And as they drank coffee they ate the delicate, tasty chocolates Alana had brought and chatted about Abigail as Will always wanted to hear about what she was doing. She yawned and said, “Sorry.”

“No, it’s fine. Long day.” He made an offering gesture with the coffee pot.

“No, thanks, I should go. It’s late. Everything was delicious. Thank you for having me, especially as I sort of invited myself.”

“I’m pleased you came and that you enjoyed dinner.” He studied his coffee and said, “You should always invite yourself. I don’t always have the social graces to offer an invitation but you’re always welcome.” She stood and he mirrored her. She stretched and then crouched to pat the dogs, “It was nice to see you, boys.” Will followed her to the front door and helped her with her coat.

“Thanks again, Will.”

“It was a pleasure,” he said and he meant it. He followed her onto the porch and waved to her as she pulled down the driveway. Inside he poured the rest of the now-cool soup into two large Chinese takeout containers. He put them in the freezer. He put everything else away and washed his hands. After taking his last handful of pills for the day he took the dogs outside through the kitchen door so they could answer the call of nature. He watched them, playing in the snow. They made him smile. He brought a towel to dry their paws before they walked

back into the kitchen. He looked at all the pots and pans and decided to leave them until the morning. Instead he locked the doors and turned off the lights. He stripped off his pants and button-down. As he slipped under the covers he felt and heard the dogs settling in.

It was just getting light when he woke up and, instead of getting right out of bed, he cuddled with Calvin who was next to him. Calvin was always cuddly and he snuggled up under Will's chin. Will blinked slowly and sleepily as he stroked the little dog. After twenty minutes he gently removed his feet from under Winston and sat up. In the bathroom he mechanically walked through his morning routine, still not awake but also not tired. In the kitchen he made coffee and some toast and a scrambled egg. It was easy to relax into the morning when he didn't have to leave for Hannibal's until four. He took his pills, swallowing each one with a sip of coffee.

He got the marinated catfish from the fridge and strung the meat onto long skewers and hung them on the oven rack them so that they dangled between the gaps in the rack. He set the oven to one hundred and sixty degrees. In nine hours he would have catfish jerky and he loved fish jerky. He remembered when he was little, too young to go to school, he used to sit on the dock and watch his dad on the boats. There was a place on the docks that sold fish jerky for twenty-five cents a stick. His dad would get him four to chew on as a snack. It had always been nice for Will, he got to sit by the water and be by his dad. There were always strays to play with at the port and Will would slip them little pieces of the jerky.

He remembered one time he'd gotten mites from one of the strays and his dad had ended up shaving all of their heads. Richy had been pissed because he'd been seventeen and had a really cool mullet. He remembered his dad saying, "We're poor but we're not so poor that we think having mites is acceptable. We can't be sure they're gone if you still have hair." Richy had been angry at Will, for the loss of his hair and the angry little bites he was covered in, and his dad said, "Billy's only four. It's not his fault; he didn't mean it." But afterwards, once they were alone, his dad said, "Baby, why don't you play with the clean ones? You always play with the mangiest, filthiest dogs at the dock."

Will had looked at his hands, they were red dots all over them from the mites, and he felt embarrassed on behalf of the dirty dogs. "People play with the clean ones. No one ever plays with the ones with mange. If they smell people won't even let them sit by their boats. People throw things at them to get them to go away. It's not their fault that they smell. They don't want to smell but they want to play."

His dad had kissed his newly bald head and said, "Okay. But from now on, roll your sleeves up when you touch them and only pet them: no more hugging. Okay, Billy? You can play with them but no more cuddling. The mites got on your hair and your clothes."

Will nodded and leaned up to kiss his cheek. He'd never hugged one of the mangy ones again and now, when he picked up his strays, he always washed them and examined them before he let them in the house. But even though he hadn't hugged the filthy ones he'd still shared his fish jerky and he would share his jerky with his dog once it was done.

He took a fast shower and pulled on clothes. The dogs were still drowsing and Will went to the kitchen and shook the kibble bag loudly. The dogs were instantly up and in the kitchen, ready for breakfast. Will poured out their bowls and left them to eat while he gathered up his

laundry. He set the machine going and pulled on his shoes. He drank another cup of coffee watching the dogs enjoy their meal and making sure the little dogs got their fill.

Once they were done Will said, “Okay, boys, let’s take a walk.” They went out over the fields and marched through the snow. The younger dogs loved it but Harry who was both the smallest and oldest got tired faster. Will picked him up and zipped him inside his coat next to his chest. Harry rested his head against Will’s neck. After an hour Harry started to wriggle against him so Will let him down again.

After a few hours he headed back home and realized that he had nothing to do. He’d dismantled the motor. He looked around, startled. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d not had a project. He didn’t have a TV to watch, or a computer to play on and he found that books could be distressing. He would be fine and then he’d get too sucked in and things that upset the characters left him a wreck so he generally gave fiction a miss, history left him bored and he’d already read all of the science journals he liked earlier in the week. So, instead, he started to clean the house rigorously. There were still the dishes from last night and he scrubbed them clean. Then he turned his attention on the carpets. Charlie tried to battle the vacuum. He charged into the room as Will turned it on and ran headlong at it. Will thought it was hilarious.

The dogs would have followed him around if it weren’t for the smell of the curing catfish that kept them mostly in the kitchen. He cleaned his windows, inside and out, and then checked the fish and found it was done though still soft. He unstrung the meat and put in on a flat baking pan to cool and harden. But he ate a few still warm for a late lunch. The dogs wouldn’t appreciate it until it was chewy and tough. He put the pan on top of the fridge where the dogs couldn’t get to them.

Either his fever was back or cleaning had worked up more of a sweat than he thought. He found the thermometer and placed it under his tongue. His head didn’t hurt but that didn’t mean much. He had a temperature of one oh one and he took some aspirin despite his lack of a headache. He sighed and decided to take a shower to get rid of the sweat before the pills kicked in. He bathed thoroughly, letting cold water cut over his skin. He stubble was still the right length from the morning so he didn’t need to get out his razor or apply any Old Spice that would offend Hannibal’s nose. He liked stubble, because he looked too young when he was completely clean shaven. No one ever took him seriously when he shaved because he looked like he was fifteen. He put on simple clothes to hook up the boat but he put his best suit in a suit bag with a nice shirt. He grabbed his nice shoes and went to the kitchen where he boxed up the rest of the catfish cakes and wrapped some of the jerky in a plastic sandwich bag. Then he let the dogs out for one last chance to relieve themselves before he went out. He took his afternoon pills and packed his own now-cool jerky into Tupperware.

He whistled for the dogs and shut the backdoor after them. He put out their dinner even though it was earlier and said, “I’m going out and I’m going to be late but don’t worry: I’ll come home.” Winston followed him to the front door, “It’s okay, Winston. I promise I’m coming home. Go eat dinner.” He picked up his things but the dog just looked at him and sank to the floor. He drove over to his boatshed and unlocked the door to get the trailer. It reeked of old air and damp wood but Will didn’t mind. He got covered in cobwebs but it didn’t matter because he would change into his suit after they got his boat. He wiped his

hands on his jeans and then carded his fingers through his hair, getting the worst of the dust off. He hooked the trailer to his car and drove over to Hannibal's house.

He listened to Johnny Cash and took the corners slowly. He sang along with the stereo, content in his own skin. He pulled up in front of Hannibal's house and got out, taking his things with him. Hannibal opened the door mere moments after Will knocked.

"Hello," Will said. "You're wearing jeans."

"Your keen observational skills are what make you such a good special agent," Hannibal said with a nod.

Will laughed, "Sorry. I've never seen you in such relaxed clothes other than when I end up in your kitchen too late at night. Never in jeans. I didn't know you owned any."

"Did you think I hunt in suits?"

"No, I don't know. You look nice."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, "In jeans?"

Will shrugged, "You look relaxed." He held out the Tupperware. "I thought of all the times you've brought me food and thought it was time to return the favor." Hannibal ushered him into the house and Will led the way to the kitchen. "I caught a huge catfish. I've never caught a catfish this far north. I made po boys which you would have hated; I made gumbo which you would have hated and then I made jerky which you might not like and cakes that I can't imagine anyone not liking." Hannibal accepted the Tupperware and removed the lid. "The cakes will be better warmed up but the jerky is perfect just as it is."

Hannibal tried some of the jerky and sighed, "Will, that is delicious."

"Good. It took twenty-two hours. Not an intensive twenty-two hours: eleven in the fridge and ten in the oven. But twenty-two hours is a long time for a snack. It would have been bad if it didn't turn out right."

Hannibal put the lid on the Tupperware and put it in the fridge, "Shall we go?"

"Yes, that would be good." They headed out to the car and Will thought of the Johnny Cash on the stereo. Hannibal was coming with him to pick up a rusty boat and Will knew he would hate the music and said, "You can be in charge of the radio."

"How kind of you," said Hannibal and tuned the radio the minute they got into the car to a classic radio station. They drove in silence. After a little while Hannibal said, "Your spatial recognition has improved a great deal."

Will just smiled. They pulled up in front of the house. It was a little rundown and Will felt his anxiety flair. Rundown houses were sometimes indicative of rundown, sad lives. "If we're invited in say no, okay?"

"I never would have said yes."

“Thank you.”

“I’m here to help you, Will.”

“Thank you.”

They got out and it was actually Hannibal who knocked. A woman opened the door and said, “Hi. I’m so glad you’re real. I thought my husband made you up and would just hide it somewhere else.”

She was young but had lines around her mouth caused by smiling and Will felt slightly more comfortable for it. “It’s a beautiful boat,” said Will.

“Oh, no, you’re like him. Is it going to rust in your garage now?” she was smiling as she said it.

“No, it’s going to stay in my driveway as I fix it.”

“Oh good, so you can fix it. He thought he could.”

“I grew up working on boats.”

She nodded but said, “Good luck.” Then she called over her shoulder, “Honey, the man and a friend,” she looked at Will.

“Will Graham,” he said. And then added, “And Hannibal Lecter.”

“Will and Hannibal are here to look at the boat.”

A man came wearing ripped jeans. Despite that there was something very clean about him. His cuticles were perfect and he didn’t look like he could fix a boat. He offered his hand and Hannibal cut ahead of him and shook he man’s hand, “Hello, I’m Hannibal. I’m here to help load the boat should Will choose to buy it.” The man introduced himself and forgot about shaking Will’s hand.

“Would you like to see the boat?”

“Yes please,” said Will.

“It’s ‘round back in the garage,” said the man.

“I really hope you like it and take it away,” said his wife. Hannibal laughed for both of them. Will and he followed the man around the house to a barn like structure he pushed open the doors and there it was.

Will felt his pulse accelerate. It was pretty badly beaten up, rusted so badly in some places Will imagined he could see daylight through it. His hands itched to climb it and look in the motor. The man had put the boat on frame with casters and Will didn’t think it would be hard to get it on to the trailer. The man pulled it out of the garage and then put the brakes on the

casters. It was more beaten up in the daylight and Will wanted it. He had a riveter and welding tools so all he needed was paint, sandpaper and time.

Will pointed to the ladder, “Do you mind?”

“No, of course.” The man gestured for Will to go ahead.

Climbing, Will thought that the ladder’s solidness was a good sign. There was rust inside but not as bad as the outside and not in the same spots as the outside which was good, none of it had rusted through. The joints in the metal were all solid and Will read it as being structurally sound. The benches would be fine once they were sanded and revarnished. The control panel all around the steering wheel looked right and leaning down he opened the cabinet and saw that most of the wires were disconnected or damaged. He would need new wiring material but none of the important parts looked corroded. Pointing to the motor casing Will asked, “Do you have a screwdriver, please?”

“Sure, let me go grab one from inside.”

The man headed into the house and Hannibal said, “What do you think?”

“I haven’t looked at the motor yet. But, the work do far would need about three weeks of eight to six work.”

“Is that like nine to five work?” asked Hannibal.

“Yes, it’s just the hours my dad works. With the hours I’ve been working for my job and Jack? Three months.”

“The owner looks nervous as you aren’t speaking.”

“Well, it’s a big job and his wife wants him to get rid of it. He’s probably pretty anxious to get rid of it. But I don’t want to say anything until I’ve seen the motor. I don’t want to get his hopes up.”

Hannibal nodded as the man came back. Will leaned over the side and the man stood on tip-toes to hand it off. Will unscrewed the lid and got his first look at the engine. It needed some gears replaced, it needed to be cleaned, it needed to be oiled but it wasn’t a huge job. “How much did you pay?”

“Five hundred,” said his wife. Will had missed her coming out. She sounded exasperated, not mad, they were happily married and she loved her husband. “Bought it from a supposed friend.”

Will shook his head, “You didn’t overpay. Scrap alone would be eight hundred. It’s going to take me four months to get it running and into the water. It’s lost its roof, it used to have one, so that will take longer. I’ll build one. By August I’ll have that rigged up. You asked for three hundred?”

“Yeah, recoup some of the money,” said the guy.

“And how long ago did you get it?” asked Will.

“About a year now,” said his wife.

Will nodded, “Well, you did the right thing keeping it dry and out of the sun. Let’s meet in the middle and say four hundred?” Hannibal was standing behind the couple and looked amused and there was a fondness in his smile. Will looked to the couple. “Sound good?”

“You’re upping the price?” the man asked.

“Yeah, why not. It seems fairer.”

It was all hammered out quickly and the guy accepted a personal check that had Will’s phone and address on it. Then they had to finagle it onto Will’s trailer and hook it in. Will couldn’t avoid shaking the man’s hand after that but having a boat hooked to his car made it slightly easier to handle.

As they pulled away Hannibal said, “You went above the asking price.”

“When you play the lottery you’re not buying a chance to win you’re buying a week of thinking about what you would do if you won. They paid a hundred bucks to imagine what it would be like have a nice boat. I don’t think they should pay two hundred dollars for that dream. A hundred bucks seems fair. It’s still worth more than I paid. It’s still a bargain.”

Hannibal reached for the radio to turn the music up slightly, “If more people were like you, Will, you’d be out of a job.”

“If more people were like me the human race would die out,” Will responded as Tchaikovsky filled the car.

End Notes

The idea of baby!Will being embarrassed on behalf of filthy dogs makes me go “awww” every time I think if it. The inspiration for that piece of back story comes from the first chapter of Red Dragon where Jack Crawford sees Will’s dogs. He’s so shocked at how ugly they are that Will explains, “These are probably dogs. People dump small ones here all the time. I can give away the cute ones. The rest stay around and get to be big ones.”

Also, you can learn about making jerky in your oven here: http://taste-for-adventure.tablespoon.com/2012/06/08/oven-beef-jerky/

Works inspired by this one

(Podfic) Fly Fishing the Improbable by Azure_K_Mello, ventusprinceps

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!